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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to assess, on a national basis, what education and training preservice elementary education teachers receive on the topic of home-school communication, especially in the area of parent-teacher conferencing, and to determine if there were significant differences between teacher education programs in how they prepare preservice teachers for conducting conferences. A total of 384 teacher education programs participated in the study. A questionnaire was used to collect demographic information, to determine educational practices in training preservice teachers in parent-teacher conferencing, and to assess attitudes regarding home-school communication. Results indicated that 66 percent of the programs surveyed provided education and training in parent-teacher conferencing, and that there were significant differences in how this training was provided as well as in its content. Attitudinal results indicated the following perceptions: (1) the parent-teacher conference was regarded as an important part of home-school communication; (2) preservice elementary education teachers are graduating from teacher education programs not educated and trained to work effectively with parents; and (3) preservice elementary education teachers need to be educated in effective home-school communication techniques. (Contains 27 references.) (Author)

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RESEARCH FORUM PRESENTATION
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1. TITLE: Assessment of Preservice Elementary Teacher Education Practices in Parent-Teacher Conferencing

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3. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH:

a. Abstract: This study was designed to assess on a national basis what education and training preservice elementary education teachers receive on the topic of home-school communication, especially in the area of parent-teacher conferencing, and to determine if there were significant differences between teacher education programs in how they prepare preservice teachers for conducting conferences. A total of 384 teacher education programs participated in the study. A questionnaire was used to collect demographic information, to determine educational practices in training preservice elementary education teachers in parent-teacher conferencing, and to assess attitudes regarding home-school communication. The results were that the majority (66%) of teacher education programs surveyed provided preservice elementary education teachers with education and training in parent-teacher conferencing and that there were significant differences in how this training was provided as well as in its content. Attitudinal results indicated the following perceptions: 1) the parent-teacher conference was regarded as an

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important part of home-school communication; 2) preservice elementary education teachers are graduating from teacher education programs not educated and trained to work effectively with parents; and 3) preservice elementary education teachers need to be educated in effective home-school communication techniques.

b. Research Questions:

1. Do teacher education programs provide education and training in parent-teacher conferencing for preservice elementary education teacher?
2. If teacher education programs do provide education and training in parent-teacher conferencing, are there significant differences between teacher education programs in regard to this education and training for preservice elementary education teachers?
3. If there are significant differences between teacher education programs, what are they?
4. What are the attitudes concerning the need for and the importance of educating preservice elementary education teachers in parent-teacher conferencing?

c. Rationale: Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers consistently rank parent involvement high among the components of effective schools. Research not only confirms that children whose parents support and encourage school activities have an advantage, but it also indicates that communication between parents and school is an essential part of effective educational programs (Coleman, 1991; Davies, 1991; Epstein, 1991; Levine & Lezotte, 1990). Close communication between home and school helps educators understand the needs and expectations of students and parents, provides up-to-date information about the school, establishes shared goals, and builds support and commitment to the school and its objectives. In most of the recent reports on the condition of education, the important roles parents play in their children's education have been

stressed. For example, Bennett (1986) noted in his report on elementary education in America that "The single best way to improve elementary education is to strengthen parents' role in it . . ." For these reasons, many schools are making efforts to build home-school partnerships and communication links. Evidence exists to support the parent-teacher conference as an important part of parent involvement and home-school communication (Berger,1987; Bjorklund & Burger, 1987; Cattermole & Robinson,1985; Fuller,1982; Gallup,1979; Kroth,1980).

With conferencing considered an important home-school communication link, the professional literature is abundant with articles offering practical advice, how-tos, and recommendations for improving parent-teacher interactions in the conferencing process. Although these articles tend to be helpful to teachers, they are not firmly grounded in research. Parent-teacher conferencing has not been adequately investigated, and little research information exists about the nature of conferencing (Cattermole & Robinson,1985; Wallbrown & Prichard, 1979; Zuga,1983). However, a number of studies have recommended that professionals be trained in effective home-school communication techniques and specifically in conferencing skills (Brown,1989; Harris,1983; Kroth,1980; Rutherford & Edgar,1979; Schaefer,1983; Williams,1984). Additionally, the limited and dated research that does exist on training teachers in the conferencing process has utilized an interpersonal skills training approach with generally positive results (Aspy,1975; Aspy & Roebuck,1977; Hetrick,1979; Ledebur,1982; Roebuck & Aspy,1977; Rutherford & Edgar,1979). Rotter and Robinson (1982) noted that effective parent-teacher conferences have "the potential to be the single most educationally valuable event for the student during the school year" (p.1). Yet, according to the limited research conducted, only a few teachers have received formal training in this important area (Fuller,1982; Rutherford & Edgar,1979).

The objectives of this study were:

1. To determine on a national basis what training pre-service teachers in elementary education are receiving in the area of home-school communication, especially in parent-teacher conferencing.
2. To determine if there are significant differences between teacher training institutions in regard to home-school communication training for preservice teachers in elementary education, and if differences exist,
3. To discern what those significant differences are between the teacher training institutions.
4. To assess attitudes concerning the need for and importance of educating preservice teachers in parent-teacher conferencing.

d. Methodology: A survey was designed to collect demographic information and to provide detailed information on the prevalence of conditions, practices, and attitudes about preservice elementary teacher education in home-school communication, in particular for parent-teacher conferencing. The survey was mailed to 505 elementary teacher education programs randomly sampled from 1087 elementary education programs listed in The College Blue Book (1990). A total of 384 of the 505 surveys sent were returned providing a return rate of 76%.

e. Analysis: All responses from the survey were converted to computer op-scan for analysis. Reliability for the survey was computed at $r_{11} = 0.72$ using the Kuder-Richardson Formula and was determined to be reliable for analysis (Thorndike & Hagen, 1986). Upper confidence limits for a binomial distribution were used to indicate the significance of the results (Snedecor & Cochran, 1989).

f. Findings: Results indicated that only 66% of the 384 elementary teacher education programs responding to the survey provide education and training for preservice teachers in parent-teacher conferencing even though 96% of those surveyed eithe agreed or strongly agreed that parent-teacher conferencing is an important part of home-school communication, 93% agreed or strongly agreed that preservice teachers need to be educated in effective home-school communication techniques, and 76% either agreed or strongly agreed that preservice teacher are graduated from teacher education programs not educated in how to work effectively with parents. Of the teacher education programs that provide for education in conferencing, 54% provided for this instruction in a course, 57% of the courses were 3 credits, and 81% of the courses devoted only 1-10% of the content to conferencing.

The main focus of the conferencing content was on interpersonal communication skills (15%), ways to informing parents of their child(ren)'s progress (11%), "dos and don'ts" of conferencing (20%), how to get parents involved (7%), and a combination of these four areas (47%). The content of the conferencing training included consideration of socioeconomic factors of families (86%), multi-cultural considerations (73%), and variations within the family unit (91%). Lastly, 61% of the teacher education programs required preservice teachers to participate in conferences during student teaching, yet only 20% of the cooperating teachers had inservice training to work with student teachers in parent-teacher conferencing.

g. Implications: This study has implications for teacher education in parent-teacher conferencing by providing data about the state of elementary teacher education programs in the U.S. in providing education and training in parent-teacher conferencing. Data indicates the need for teacher education programs to examine current parent-teacher communication instruction at all levels in order to prepare pre-service teachers to work effectively with parents.

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